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SUBJECT: NEW MINISTER OF RURAL REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
JARULLAH MANSOORI COMMITS TO DEEPENING PARTNERSHIP WITH U.S.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a January 26 courtesy call on Jarullah Mansoori to congratulate him on his recent confirmation as MRRD Minister, Ambassador Eikenberry solicited Mansoori's initial views and plans for the ministry, provided a brief overview of the President's Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy and expressed interest in the future direction of MRRD programs, particularly the National Solidarity Program (NSP). Referring to his recent speech to Parliament, Mansoori noted his commitment to tackle corruption at all levels and to support Afghan women. He also repeatedly expressed strong commitment to MRRD-implemented national programs (with key national program heads present), and said he sees a strong role for the ministry to play in the areas of governance and regional cooperation. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Mansoori sought details on U.S. views on reintegration and reconciliation, sub-national governance, and requested a copy of and follow-up discussions on the recently announced U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan regional strategy. In addition to committing to engage regularly, Ambassador Eikenberry indicated that he would place a call to Senator Kerry, a key supporter of NSP (who recently asked what we were doing to ensure the NSP would remain a successful local governance program under the new MRRD leadership) and would invite Mansoori to accompany him on a future field visit.

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PERSONAL BACKGROUND  
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¶3. (SBU) Mansoori was confirmed in Karzai's second round cabinet submission on January 16 (squeaking through with the minimum 113 votes of 224) as Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. Lawmakers had alleged that Mansoori lied about his age in order to be eligible for the post (rumors suggest that he is 31 years old - four years short of the age required in the Afghan constitution), but he was approved despite the discrepancies. Mansoori, associated with Tajik powerbrokers, is considered to be a political pick and a close ally of Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim, Karzai's First Vice President.

¶4. (SBU) Mansoori noted that he was born in a remote, rural village in northern Takhar province, and that his father was a tribal leader in Badakhshan province and a Northern Alliance freedom fighter. Based on his rural and refugee experiences in Pakistan, he claimed no particularly strong political or ethnic affiliations. Prior to his appointment as MRRD Minister, Mansoori served as an advisor to Minister of Interior Hanif Atmar while the latter was MRRD Minister, as an advisor to former Minister of Justice Abdul Rahim Karimi, and as Deputy General of the Afghan National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). Mansoori cited his presentation to Parliament, where he made two promises: 1) fighting corruption at all levels (he noted that he walked into MRRD, and does not own a car or maintain a personal bank account abroad); and 2) restoring the rightful place of women in society who have paid disproportionately in the sacrifices Afghans have made to date.

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COMMITMENT TO NATIONAL PROGRAMS

15. (SBU) Contrary to rumors that he would scale back MRRD-implemented national programs, Mansoori mentioned his strong support for the NSP, National Rural Access Program (NRAP), Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program (AREDP), and National Area-Based Development Program (NABDP), and the Afghanistan Institute for Rural Development (AIRD). He stressed he would be guided by two principles: 1) national inclusion -- allowing participation of the Afghan people to develop a sense of ownership in Ministry-led programs; and 2) a focus on sustainability and capacity-building. He thanked the U.S. for its generous support to date and leadership, and emphasized that MRRD should not be personality-driven but is an established ministry with systems in place which need to be strengthened. Ambassador Eikenberry reiterated U.S. commitment to strengthening sub-national governance, noting challenges at the district level where it is often weak or non-existent. MRRD is a critical partner in this regard to strengthen the link between the central, provincial, district, and community levels, he stated.

16. (SBU) Ambassador Eikenberry emphasized the significant shift in President Obama's strategy that focuses more on building the Afghan government's ability to connect with the population, indicating that the USG plans to channel significantly more assistance through the government's budget, compared to the past year. (Note: The U.S. aim is to increase the percentage of U.S. assistance that flows directly through GIROA institutions to 40 percent by FY 2011. End Note.) The Ambassador solicited Mansoori's views on how to strengthen national programs, expressing concern about the balance of power between the executive, legislative (Parliament and Provincial

KABUL 00000352 002 OF 002

Councils, with its election delays), and the local level (including Community Development Councils formed under NSP). The Minister said that money currently is allocated to line ministries, with little to no operating budget for provincial/district governors, thus weakening service delivery. There is no quick solution in sight, with debates continuing within GIROA on how to address these issues. Ambassador Eikenberry specifically highlighted the important interface between MRRD and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) in this regard.

REGIONAL STABILITY & REINTEGRATION/RECONCILIATION ROLE

17. (SBU) Turning to regional stability, Mansoori expressed interest in the U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy and requested a copy for review and follow-up discussions. Mansoori confirmed that MRRD has a role in strengthening regional cooperation and solicited U.S. views on how supportive the U.S. will be on reintegration and reconciliation. The Ambassador expressed full U.S. support, but with the following principles in mind: that the overarching principle is that it be Afghan-led, adding that the U.S. will support the process both politically and with programs. Citing President Karzai, the Ambassador reiterated the reintegration/reconciliation pre-conditions, to wit that the Taliban renounce terrorism, renounce violence against the Afghan and international communities, respect the Afghan constitution and laws of Afghanistan, and that no territory (so-called "safe areas") be ceded to the Taliban. The U.S. is optimistic, but a 'carrot' and 'stick' approach is required, he stated.

18. (SBU) Comment: While commentators have raised questions about Mansoori's qualifications and experience to manage a Ministry of this magnitude, this initial meeting provides grounds for cautious optimism and a renewed commitment to deepening our existing strong partnership. End Comment.

RICCIARDONE

Clearance page: Courtesy call with Jarullah Mansoori, Minister of

Rural Rehabilitation  
and Development (MRRD): SBU

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